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Bullying: harmful and hidden behavior in organizations

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Abstract

The purposes of this paper are to examine the concept, types, reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying and propose the comprehensive bullying model summarizing reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying to prevent and get rid of it in organizations. First of all, it is expected that this paper will make contributions to academicians who will conduct studies in the field of bullying. It is also expected that this paper will make contributions to managers and entrepreneurs to be aware of harms of bullying, train HR professionals and all employees about them, prevent and get rid of bullying behaviors and bullies in their organization.

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1. Introduction

There are several studies conducted in the field of bullying in organizations in the management literature in the World. Bullying discourages employee motivation, organizational commitment, attendance and career planning. The purposes of this paper are to examine the concept, types, reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying and propose the comprehensive bullying model summarizing reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying to prevent and get rid of it in organizations. Introduction is the first section, the concept of bullying will be examined in the second section, the types of bullying will be explained in the third section, the reasons of bullying will be highlighted in the fourth section, the methods of bullying will be stated in the fifth section, the consequences of bullying will be pointed out in the sixth section, the remedies of bullying will be explained in the seventh section and the bullying model will be proposed in the eight section. Finally, the conclusion will be the last section of this paper.

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2. The Concept of Bullying

Bullying is a major problem in organizations. It is a systematic, long term abusive treatment against an employee. Bullied employee starts to see himself/herself as a victim and feels helplessness in an organization.

The concept of bullying (a victim is socially excluded, tormented, teased, and harassed at work) was introduced in the mid 1980s by Norwegian and Swedish organizational psychologists (Leymann, 1986; Matthiesen, Raknes and Røkkum, 1989; Kile, 1990). International research started in the early 1990s (Zapf and Leymann, 1996; Sheehan, Barker and Rayner, 1999; Hoel, Rayner and Cooper, 1999; Zapf and Einarsen, 2001; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper, 2003) (Einarsen et al.: 2).

Leyman (1990) developed the concept of “workplace bullying” which was an abusive behavior. He (1990) examined traumatized workers’ psychology. He (1990) realized that employees who were humiliated, excluded or punished by collective behaviors of their coworkers had severe damages. Namie (2000) adds that workplace bullying which is repeated hostile and aggressive behavior targeting certain employees in a systematic manner causes them feel distressed, offended and humiliated. He (2007) states that workplace bullying is a phenomenon in which an employee considers himself/herself as a defenseless victim of the negative actions of one or more coworkers. Vartia (1996) and Hoel and Cooper (2000) believe that workplace bullying is persistent and repeated negative behavior due to power imbalance and causes hostile environment. They (1996, 2000) add that the victim cannot defend himself/herself or retaliate equally. Einarsen et al. (1994) acknowledge that workplace bullying is a negative treatment against a victim, makes him/her feel inferior in a questioned situation and may concern both work-related and non-work-related issues (Öztürk, 2011: 2-3).

According to Einarsen et al. (2011: 15), “Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label of bullying to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process, it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts” (Giorgi, 2012: 261-262).

According to Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007: 735), bullying is a situation in which an employee receives negative treatment systematically for a long time and cannot defend himself/herself against this treatment easily (Branch et al., 2013: 281). Interactions between people who have equal power are not workplace bullying (Hoel and Cooper, 2001; Rayner et al., 2002; Einarsen et al., 2011) (Branch et al., 2013: 282).

Studies reveal that a significant number of employees face with persistent workplace bullying (Keashly and Harvey, 2006). Between 10% and 15% of employees face with workplace bullying in Europe (Zapf *et al.*, 2011) and North America (Keashly and Jagatic, 2011). According to some researchers (Leymann, 1996), bullying behaviors have to occur “at least once a week for six months to be considered as bullying” (Branch et al., 2013: 281).

Workplace bullying is both global and local problem. Studies reveal that the existence of bullying goes up to 17% (Nielsen et al., 2010). Bilgel et al. (2006) and Yildiz et al. (2008) showed that 55% and 40% of employees revealed that they faced bullying respectively (Giorgi, 2012: 263).

3. The Types of Bullying

Bullying can occur in different types in organizations. All types cause major personal and organizational problems.

According to Einarsen (1999), dispute-related bullying and predatory bullying are bullying types. Predatory bullying happens where the victim coincidentally faces with aggression and power abuse of other people whereas dispute-related bullying is originated in a conflict situation in an organization. Predatory bullying causes from destructive superiors and leadership styles, poor working environment, prejudice and scapegoats appointment. These two types of bullying can interchange during the process. Many victims acknowledged that the bullying started after they brought attention to a problem or they advocated a different view than their superiors or important colleagues.

These conflicts became intense and took on the form of bullying of “the weakest party” in a conflict (Einarsen et al.: 24-26).

Work related bullying (withholding crucial information, unmanageable workloads, excessive monitoring, and unreasonable deadlines) and personal bullying (insulting remarks, persistent criticism, gossip, excessive teasing) are two types of workplace bullying (Nielsen et al., 2009) (Giorgi, 2012: 262).

There are three types of bullying: downwards bullying (bullying of managers against their subordinates), upwards bullying (bullying of subordinates against their managers) and horizontal bullying (bullying of one colleague to another one). Most of the studies focused on downwards bullying, some of the studies focused on horizontal bullying and recent studies focused on upwards bullying (Zapf et al., 2011). Bullying may occur in all organizational levels (Branch et al., 2013: 281), most industries and organizations (Lewis and Gunn, 2007) (Branch et al., 2013: 281).

The power imbalance has a crucial role in horizontal bullying. Thobaben (2007) defined a horizontal bullying as hostile and harmful behavior by a bully or bullies toward a coworker or coworkers via attitudes, behaviors or actions. The bully may feel that he or she has more power because of knowledge, experience, seniority etc. Although the management doesn't give more power to the bully, the bully feels more powerful to act and the victim feels less powerful to defend or protect himself/herself (Granstra, 2015: 250).

4. The Reasons of Bullying

Bullying are caused by several reasons. These reasons can be related to the bully's psychological problems, beliefs, fears, career goals or the victim's psychological problems, behaviors, and career goals.

Reasons of bullying can be considered as hierarchy system (superior power of the bully), seniority of the bully, insecurity of the bully, territorial tendency of the bully (victim not conforming expectations of the bully), and educational differences of the bully and the victim (Granstra, 2015: 252-253).

Organizational culture and environment, the personality of the victim and the bully, the leadership style of immediate superiors are main reasons of bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994; Dofradottir and Høgh, 2002; Rayner, Hoel and Cooper, 2002). On the other hand, socio-economic changes causing restructuring and competition, working conditions, organizational changes, and poorly executed conflict management trigger bullying (Einarsen et al.: 30-31).

Many studies show that bullying consists of organizational and individual antecedents. Organizational antecedents of bullying are as follows: working conditions and job design (Notelaers et al., 2010), leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007), organizational culture and climate (Spector et al., 2007; Hauge et al., 2007; Giorgi, 2009, 2010) and motivating and triggering variables (Salin, 2003). Working conditions such as role ambiguity and role conflict can increase in bullying situations (Hauge et al., 2007; Baillien et al., 2009). Individual antecedents such as problematic people (neurotic, oversensitive, suspicious, and depressive employees, employees who convert psychological distress into psychosomatic illnesses) and poor social competencies may explain why certain employees are victims for bullying (Glasø et al., 2007; Høgh et al., 2010) (Giorgi, 2012: 262).

5. The Methods of Bullying

There may be several methods of bullying depending upon the victim, his/her job, and the organization. Bullying methods are usually tailored for each victim based on the capabilities of the bullies and organizational weaknesses.

Cleary et al. (2010) highlight that bullying behaviors can vary in a broad spectrum and bullying strategies are flexible, creative and tailored for the victim so it is very difficult to define all of them. They (2010) explain the most common bullying behaviors are as follows: ignoring or excluding the victim, ignoring professional opinion of the victim, allocating an unmanageable workload to the victim, spreading rumors about the victim, humiliating the victim about his/her work, ordering the victim to carry out work below his/her competence level, withholding relevant information to the victim's work, and giving impossible targets or deadlines to the victim (Granstra, 2015: 251).

Jóhannsdóttir and Ólafsson (2004) believe that work-related bullying can consist of unfair criticism, excessive workloads and tasks irrelevant to the job. Victims can be relocated to degrading and humiliating positions and tasks (Leymann, 1990; Salin, 2003). “Bullying is the strong antecedent to health impairment (Hogh et al., 2011b), leading to an increased sickness absence (Kivimäki et al., 2000) and an increased risk of work disability” (Berthelsen et al., 2011). “Health impairment outcomes may be related to quantitative job insecurity by representing a fear of not being able to return to work, and to qualitative job insecurity by hindering the targets’ possibilities of developing a career within the organization.” Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) showed that some victims perceived their career expectations as being damaged. Jennifer et al. (2003) revealed increased threat to professional status of victims (Glambek et al., 2014: 257).

Bullying events can be social ostracism, public humiliation, rudeness, work obstruction and disruption, exclusion, responsibility removal, limited access to career opportunities, and withholding job related information (Farrell, 1999; Hoel and Cooper, 2000; Hoel et al., 2002; Lee, 2002; Hillard, 2009). Bullying includes unfair penal sanctions and power abuses (Dawn et al., 2003). Bullying has serious methods such as “misuse of organizational resources, misuse of organizational power and authority (influencing others’ misuse of appointment, selection or promotion processes, inappropriate use of employment policies and processes, misuse of power and authority to create punitive policy, misuse of organizational power and policy to intimidate or harass, and misuse of legitimate change processes) and professional misconduct (spreading gossip, intimidating, unfair, or abusive behaviours, misusing knowledge of a victim’s personal circumstances, maladministration including unethical and dishonest practices, public humiliation of a victim, failure to adhere to professional codes of conduct, failure in a duty of care, excessive monitoring, and staff work obstruction)” (Vickers, 2014: 98-109).

6. The Consequences of Bullying

Bullying has several consequences varying from health problems for the victim to loss of reputation for the organization. They cause organizations lose time, resources, efficiency and money.

Bullying cause severe health problems for victims such as anger, anxiety, sleep disorders, fatigue, concentration disorders, depression and somatic disorders (Zapf and Einarsen, 2005; Einarsen et al., 2011). Also, bullying cause organizational problems such as reduced performance, absenteeism, and turnover (Topa-Cantisano et al., 2007; Hoel et al., 2010) (Giorgi, 2012: 262).

Several authors (Namie, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Strandmark and Hallberg, 2007; Tracy and Alberts, 2007; LeVan and Martin, 2008) point out that workplace bullying has negative effects on organizations, employees, society and economy. Einarsen and Raknes (1997) and Salin (2001) believe that workplace bullying creates stress, decreases health, morale and job performance of the victim. Rayner and Cooper (1997) and Keashly (1998) reveal that workplace bullying cause earlier retirement and higher absenteeism, intention to leave the organization and turnover. Aquino and Bommer (2003) acknowledge that workplace bullying causes anxiety which decreases work performance. Aquino and Bommer (2003) add that employers are obligated morally and legally for providing safe work place (Öztürk, 2011: 2-3).

Outcomes of workplace bullying are summarized by Moayed et al. (2006: 319) as follows in Table 1:

Table 1. Outcomes of Workplace Bullying

Outcomes of bullying	Kivimäki et al. (2000)	Varita (2001)	Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002)	Quine (2003)	Kivimäki et al. (2003)
Chronic disease	x				
Medically certified sickness absence	x				
Self-certified sickness absence	x				
Higher general stress		x			
High mental stress reaction		x			
Low self-confidence		x			
More psychological health complaints			x	x	x
More psychosomatic complaints			x		
Lower job satisfaction				x	
More cardiovascular diseases					x

Source: Farman A. Moayed, Nancy Daraiseh, Richard Shell and Sam Salem (2006) Workplace Bullying: A Systematic Review of Risk Factors and Outcomes, Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 319, DOI: 10.1080/14639220500090604

Some of the reported consequences of bullying for victims are physical symptoms, psychosomatic illnesses, feelings of helplessness, irritability, lowered self-esteem, anxiety, anger, mood swings, social isolation and maladjustment, depression, paranoia, despair, burnout, and low job satisfaction and well-being (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2004; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). The low quality of the work environment (Einarsen et al., 1994) and the intention to leave (Djurkovic, McCormack and Casimir, 2008) are organizational consequences of bullying. Organizations are considered as responsible for bullying (Hoel and Cooper, 2000; Salin, 2003; Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen, 2007; Coleman Gallagher, Harris and Valle, 2008) and the key to reduce the frequency or impact of bullying (Sheehan and Barker, 1999; Rayner, 1999; Coyne, Chong, Seigne and Randall, 2003; Tehrani, 2005; Hodson, Roscigno and Lopez, 2006; Namie, 2007; Health and Safety Authority, 2007; Salin, 2009; Bulutlar and Oz, 2009) (Galanaki and Papalexandris, 2013: 2109).

Einarsen et al. (43-50) explain that bullying has negative personal health, organizational and socio-economic consequences for the victim and his/her colleagues. Their opinions are presented in Table 2 (Einarsen et al., 43-50):

Table 2. Personal Health, Organizational and Socio-Economic Consequences Of Bullying

Personal Health Consequences	Organizational Consequences	Socio-economic Consequences
Psychological problems • Fear/anxiety • Concentration difficulties • Irritability • Insomnia • Depression Muscular/skeletal problems • Backache • Neck pain • Arm and leg aches • Shoulder ache Psychosomatic problems • Constipation • Diarrhoea • Heart palpitations • Stomachache • Headache • Nausea	• Poor cooperation • High recruitment and employment costs • High level of sickness absence • Decreased productivity • Harmed public reputation • Expenses of legal action • Expenses of complaints and internal measures	• Medical attention and treatment • Long-term sickness absence • Unemployment • Consequences for the family and next of kin • Early retirement

Source: This table is adopted from Ståle Einarsen, Helge Hoel, Morten Birkeland Nielsen, Workplace Bullying, pp. 43-50 <http://www.arbeidstilsynet.no/binfil/download2.php?tid=97307>

Giorgi (2012) conducted a study to determine relationships among work place, bullying and health. His goal was to reveal that “workplace bullying had an indirect relationship with health through organizational climate.” He (2012) developed a bullying model in which bullying affected health directly and indirectly through organizational climate’s mediation. He (2012) found that bullying was a cause of organizational climate.

“Bullying is a precursor of job dissatisfaction (Frank et al., 1999) and an antecedent to turnover intention” (Chen et al., 2011). Bullying may trigger escape behaviour thoughts (Zapf and Gross, 2001) and the victim may consider quitting due to getting rid of a painful situation (Hogh et al., 2011). Leymann (1990, 1992, 1996) highlights that an exclusion from work will be the final step of the bullying if bullying is not handled properly in organizations. He (1990, 1992, 1996) adds that victims may not find or maintain work afterwards (Glambek et al., 2014: 256-258).

7. Remedies of Bullying

Entrepreneurs and managers should be aware of harms of bullying and focus on remedies to prevent and get rid of bullying in their organizations. They need to develop appropriate strategies, policies and training programs to fight against bullying. They have to create an organizational culture and climate which have no tolerance to bullying.

Remedies of bullying can be removing hierarchy system, mentoring to provide methods and emotional support, developing appropriate organizational culture and policies for safe organizations and zero-tolerance to bullying (Granstra, 2015: 254-256).

Organizations can develop ‘No Bullying’ policies and training to prevent bullying. Salin (2008: 223) shows that HR practitioners need to develop ‘No Bullying’ policies to reach a “commitment to a bullying-free environment”. He (2008: 223) adds that organizations can define bullying behaviours and consequences, identify contact people for the bullying cases, outline complaints and investigation processes for bullying. On the other hand, some studies (Salin, 2008; D’Cruz and Noronha’s, 2010) reveal that when victims inform HR departments to stop bullying actions, HR departments blame them, lead them to their immediate supervisors, do not believe them, do not involve to the problem and do not provide assurance to solve the problem. Although, informal measures such as support of colleagues highlight bullying problems (D’Cruz and Noronha, 2010), most of the HR departments apply complaints policy which requires a written complaint in which the victim lets the bully to learn details of the problem (Rayner and Lewis, 2011). According to McCarthy et al. (2002), awareness training strategies including employees and employers knowledge of obligations and responsibilities, a complaints system and an effective risk identification process are suggested besides “No Bullying” policy to be applied by HR professionals to solve bullying problems. McCarthy et al. (2002) and Vartia et al. (2003) believe that training about bullying, bullying cases management and support mechanisms inside and outside the organization are also suggested. McCarthy et al. (1995) state that interpersonal skills training, stress management and conflict resolution assist the victims to manage bullying behaviours better (Branch et al., 2013: 289-290).

8. The Bullying Model

The comprehensive bullying model summarizing reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying to prevent and get rid of it in organizations is proposed in this section.

Zapf (1999) summarized reasons, methods and results of bullying (Yıldız and Yıldız, 2009, 139). Also, Moayed et al. (2006: 313) revealed risk factors, behaviors and outcomes of bullying. Nielsen and Einarsen (2012: 313) developed a theoretical model which showed the relationships between the outcomes of workplace bullying. Table 3 is developed from studies of them and other authors mentioned in this paper. It presents The Bullying Model which summarizes reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying comprehensively.

Table 3. The Bullying Model

Reasons of Bullying <u>Organizational Reasons</u>	Methods of Bullying <u>Threat to Professional Status</u>	Consequences of Bullying <u>Personal Consequences</u>	Remedies of Bullying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organizational benefits and resources -Career opportunities -Organizational problems -Working conditions -Job design and job control -Uncertainty -Organizational change and restructuring -Organizational culture and climate -Organizational environment -Competition -Role ambiguity and conflict -Poorly executed conflict management -Absent, weak management and leadership -Weak HR policies and practices -Lack of “No Bullying” policy -Stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unfair penal sanctions -Work obstruction and disruption -Persistent and unfair criticism -Inaccurate accusations and blame -Threats to do or not to do a task -Prevention of resource usage -Prevention of promotion or pay increases -Throwing professional belongings (folders etc.) -Cybercrimes (hacking etc.) -Ignorance of the victim’s professional opinion -Degrading positions, tasks, and responsibilities -Limiting access to career opportunities and damaging career goals -Maladministration, unethical practices -Not applying professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Psychological Consequences</i> -Anger -Anxiety -Mood swings -Concentration difficulties -Irritability -Maladjustment -Low self confidence -Low morale -Despair -Obsession -Paranoia -Stress -Strain -Depression -Burnout -Helplessness feelings -Escape thoughts from organization -Fear to go to work -Suicidal thoughts, suicide <i>Psychosomatic Consequences</i> -Headache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Providing training to HR professionals to develop policies to prevent bullying and handle bullying cases responsibly -Providing training to employees for explaining obligations and responsibilities for bullying cases, stress management, resolving conflicts, and increasing bullying awareness -Defining bullying behaviours and consequences, identifying contact employees for the bullying cases, outlining complaints and investigation processes for bullying -Developing a complaint system, accepting verbal or written complaints of victims for bullying cases -Diagnosing bullies,

<u>Reasons of the Bully</u> -Jealousy -Hostility -Group pressure -Competition -Unrealistic feeling of power -Relations and connections -Getting advantage of benefits and resources -Getting advantage of career opportunities -Lack of control of HR department, managers and top management	codes of conduct -Misuse of power and authority (influencing superiors misuse of selection, appointment, promotion processes, inappropriate use of employment policies and processes, misuse of legitimate change process, misuse of power, authority to harass and develop punitive policy)	-Stomach ache -Backache -Dizziness, Nausea -Chronic fatigue -Insomnia -Constipation, Diarrhea <i>Muscular/skeletal Consequences</i> -Arm and leg aches -Shoulder ache -Neck pain <i>Chronic Diseases</i> -Diabetes -Rheumatoid arthritis -Osteoarthritis -Cardiovascular disease	bullying behaviors and cases -Developing No Bullying Policy -Developing organizational culture and climate which have no tolerance to bullying -Developing strategies to reach bullying-free organization -Mentoring to show methods to prevent bullying -Providing emotional and psychological support to victims -Removal of hierarchy system
<u>Reasons for the Victim</u> -Education -Qualifications, skills and abilities -Personality -Career and goals -Relations and connections -Social competencies -Problematic personality (oversensitive, suspicious, neurotic, introvert, and depressive personality, converting psychological distress into psychosomatic illnesses)	<u>Threat to Personal Status</u> -Attacking to private space -Humiliating -Threatening verbally and physically -Throwing personal belongings -Shouting -Teasing -Intimidating -Rudeness -Insulting remarks -Spreading gossip, rumor -Misusing knowledge of personal circumstances of the victim -Failure in a duty of care <u>Isolation</u> -Isolating from colleagues, managers, subordinates -Social ostracism -Ignoring, excluding -Withholding information -Ending connections and relations with key employees <u>Overwork</u> -Work overload -Drudgery -Excessive monitoring <u>Destabilization</u> -Unnecessary, irrelevant tasks -Unrealistic targets and deadlines -Unrealistic performance criterias -Repeatedly reminding mistakes -Withholding critical information	<u>Absenteeism</u> -Self certified sick absence -Medically certified sick absence <i>Disability</i> <i>Unemployment-Not Finding or Keeping Another Job</i> <i>Early Retirement</i> <i>Consequences for the Family and Next of Kin</i> <u>Organizational Consequences</u> -Mistakes in tasks -Poor cooperation -Low job satisfaction -Low organizational commitment and citizenship -Work slowdown -Low performance and productivity -Low efficiency -Financial losses -Expenses of complaints and legal action -High turnover -Loss of reputation -High recruitment and employment costs -Not finding new qualified employees to recruit	

Source: This table is inspired, adopted and expanded from the following sources: Einarsen et al.; Moayed et al. (2006: 311-327); Yıldız ve Yıldız (2009); Öztürk (2011); Nielsen and Einarsen (2012: 309-332); Giorgi (2012: 261-275); Galanaki and Papalexandris (2013: 2107-2130); Glambek et al. (2014: 255-268); Vickers (2014: 95-113); Granstra (2015: 249-257); Branch et al. (2013: 289-290).

9. Conclusion

Bullying behaviors harm motivation, organizational commitment, attendance and culture. Entrepreneurs and managers should be aware of the concept, types, reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying for their organizations. They have to watch behaviors of their employees to diagnose bullying behaviors, develop organizational culture and bullying policy to prevent bullying behaviors, punish and get rid of bullies in their organizations. First of all, it is expected that this paper will make contributions to academicians who will conduct studies in the field of bullying. It is also expected that this paper will make contributions to managers and entrepreneurs to be aware of harms of bullying, train HR professionals and all employees about them, prevent and get rid of bullying behaviors and bullies in their organizations.

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